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## LASSO LUKE

By Kit Clyde.





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# LASSO LUKE;

OR,

## THE THREE PRAIRIE PARDS.

By KIT CLYDE,

Author of "The Army Scout," "The Secrets Under the Sea," "The Spies of the Delaware," "Sou'west Fred," "Northwoods Tom," "Fighting Joe, the Game Man of the Plains," "Bow and Arrow Jack," Etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### CAPTURE OF THE WHITE MUSTANG.

A BEAUTIFUL summer day was just coming to its close.

The sun's last lingering gaze was tinging the western sky with a beautiful aureole of amber and gold.

The evening breeze had begun to stir the drooping prairie grass, and the air would soon be moist with dew.

It is a pleasant spot on a great prairie of the West that we would invite the reader's attention.

A clear, beautiful stream of water, some fifteen yards wide, laughingly danced along, glistening in the last golden rays of setting Sol.

On either side was the most luxuriant grass, and on the left was a pretty green wood, or grove, extending back from the stream some three hundred yards, and in length about five hundred yards; then, to the right, as far, almost, as the eye could see was the open prairie.

There were moving figures here, near the water, figures of nearly a hundred wild Texas horses. They had come to drink of the refreshing water, and having satisfied themselves as to that want, were now quietly grazing near the bank. They were of all colors and sizes, but the most attractive one of all was the leader.

He was beautiful indeed.

Large and powerful, white as snow, a splendid build, and his actions were grace itself.

Now quietly picking the fresh green grass, now curving symmetrically about, throwing his milk-white head and beautifully curved neck with the silken-like mane floating and waving in the evening breeze.

It was a beautiful scene to gaze upon, but their quietude was not long to last.

Suddenly the clatter of fast-approaching hoofs could be distinctly heard, and made the wild herd elevate their heads and be ready, at a move from their leader, to bound away.

The cause of the sudden change in affairs was soon made apparent.

Mounted on a large bay horse and flying like the wind toward the startled mustangs, was a man clad wholly in

buckskin, with a lithe powerful form, his glossy locks waving in the evening breeze, his black, flashing eyes bent on the wild herd. He rode in a large Mexican saddle with holsters at either side that contained deadly revolvers, and a rawhide lasso hung from the horse; a rifle was strapped to his back, and a brace of repeating pistols and knives were in his belt.

The noble animal he bestrode was bearing directly down on the startled mustangs. The latter bounded away with a dull, thundering sound, led by their snow-white leader.

Then a chase commenced.

The lone rider spoke not a word to his beautiful bay, for it did not need it; he was pressing the herd hard, and the wild horses, with their grim pursuer, rapidly cleared a couple of miles. Soon the mustangs were strung out on the prairie in single, double, or triple file—the fleetest near their fleeter leader, while the slower ones were in the line according to their rate of speed; and all putting in their best time, except the leader; that alone seemed to take the wild chase with ease.

A couple more miles passed swiftly by.

The pursuer's one purpose and aim seemed to possess the white leader, for several of the slower of the flying mustangs were already adroitly passed, and were now taking the back trail, yet the horseman touched not the lasso that hung ready for use at his saddle horn.

The powerful bay with his determined master almost flew over the ground, and gradually the wild herd was left in the rear, mile after mile was left behind in the wild chase.

And at last all were in the rear save the white leader. With a terrific bound he dashed away at renewed speed.

"Now, Darting Arrow," muttered the strange mustanger, as he dug the rowels of his spurs into his horse's side, "we'll give you White Comenez they call 'im a chase sech ez he weren't born fur." Jewhitaker slamups! but he ar' purty now, ain't he?"

Darting Arrow—as the rider had termed him—increased his wonderful speed, and seemed to disdain the ground he trod upon.



The prairie was exceedingly level, and a better place for a chase could not have been wanted.

Mile after mile was cleared without any perceptible change—they were the same distance apart as when at the starting point. On—on flew the pursued and pursuer. The late wild leader is running at his utmost ability, as is also the good Darting Arrow.

Ah! the bay gains!

Gaining—slowly gaining—on they fly!

On! on!

Two more miles fly by. Another mile.

The mustanger loosens the lasso at his saddle-horn, and urges, with word and spur, the good horse that is carrying him nearer his prey.

The pursuer still gains—he is near enough—he swings his trusty lasso above his head—then up in the air it shoots like a whip coil, and settles slowly, unerringly over the mustang's head.

Hurrah! he's won!

"Je-whitaker slam-ups!" muttered the rider, "but he's one wuth catchin', I tell ye."

The rest was but a question of time as to how long the wild horse could stand the choking pressure upon his throat.

But he succumbed after a short run, and dropped exhausted to the ground.

Now was the mustanger's time.

Springing from his foaming steed, he bent quickly over his fallen prey.

With a skillful movement of his lariat he made a double hitch about the mustang's limbs, rendering him helpless.

In the twinkling of an eye he had placed *hoking* and saddle upon him, and was upon his back.

At that moment wild, demoniacal yells sounded on the mustanger's ears, and, turning, he beheld a band of Apaches, painted and plumed, bearing directly down upon him.

"Je-whitaker slam-ups!" fell from his lips.

## CHAPTER II.

### KIOWA KIT—APACHES.

As the conqueror landed on the lately captured mustang's back, it bounded to its feet with a snort, and then commenced a fierce struggle.

The mustanger was an expert rider, and sat in his saddle as if he were a part of it.

But almost instantly the wild horse felt that he was conquered, and tamely quieted down.

The wild and demoniacal yells were rapidly drawing nearer, and putting spurs to the white mustang it bounded away like a flash.

As Darting Arrow started to follow a lithe, supple figure glided to his side, leapt upon his back, and then, with its unexpected burden, the good horse was away after his master.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack—ack!

A volley of shots sped after the fugitives, but neither of the two were harmed.

The Apaches urged their horses forward to their utmost, but they could not compare in speed with the lone mustanger's, and, after a quarter of an hour's run, gave up the chase as fruitless.

With a yell of derision the mustanger turned his now thoroughly tamed mustang, and for the first time beheld Darting Arrow's rider, who in a moment was at his side.

"Kiowa Kit," he ejaculated.

"Exactly, old pard; just put 'er there."

"Every time, leetle 'un," responded the older man, giving the younger's hand a hearty grip. The latter was possessed of a slender, but exceedingly lithe and well developed form, a trifle dark in complexion, with brown curls and eyes.

His features were regular and strikingly handsome.

He was clad in a fancifully decorated jacket of the Mexican pattern, broad-brimmed hat turned up on one side with a silver arrow, and breeches also after the Mexican style, slashed from the knee down.

A light, beautifully mounted rifle was strapped to his back, and revolvers and knife were in his belt.

His name was Kit Cameron, though he was more generally known as Kiowa Kit.

Altogether he presented a dashing appearance, and though he was not more than nineteen years of age, his looks told that he was abundantly able to care for himself in that wild region, infested with outlaws and roving bands of Indians.

His companion, who was about forty years of age, bore the name of William Groscon, though more commonly known as Tiger Bill, for in battle he resembled the tiger, but in peace or when not excited he resembled the lamb, and no kinder or truer heart ever beat in a warm bosom than Tiger Bill Groscon's.

"How'd yer happen there on my horse?" queried Bill.

"Jumped on. Say, that's a daisy you have there, Bill," referring to the captured mustang. "I almost envy you. He's the one that all the mustangers call White Comet, 'cause he's so white and is so seldom seen."

"Yes, that's 'im, I reckon. Jewhitaker slam-ups! those critter's horses over yonder's got no time 'ith 'im!"

"I caught him with Black Samson, my horse, once, but he got away again and took to the prairie."

"I'd rather have Dartin' Arrer any day, alle, samee."

"Don't wonder. But how's Luke getting along?"

"He's all right. I left 'im up ter the shanty 'while ago."

"I'll go up with you pretty soon, Bill."

"All right, little un; ye're always welcome. But I'spect ther Murilez ranch has ther most attraction for ye."

Kiowa Kit blushed, but his companion failed to notice it in the darkness.

"Come up to my cabin with me, Bill, and get something to eat, and then we'll go," said the boy mustanger.

"Wal, I reckon I have got a kind o' queer feelin' in my stomach. 'Tain't cramp, but it's a far-away manifestation which some would call a hankerin' arter grub. Yas, I could wrestle a small quantity o' it ondoubtedly, an' shall, wi' unexpressed thanks, except yer invite."

Darkness had now fairly set in, but the full moon, just arising on the distant horizon, threw a flood of light on the grand prairie.



The mustangers rode leisurely toward Kit's cabin, which was not far distant, talking the while.

"Speaking of the Murilez ranche," said, "you know that Casper Elonzo up there?"

"Reckon so."

"What do you think of him, Bill?"

The latter eyed the speaker a moment and shook his head.

"He's a fraud every day in ther week, *I* say. You'd better look out, little un, er he'll chip in ahead o' ye."

"Never fear, old man. But seriously now, what *do* you think of him?"

"Wal, I don't *think* much about it; but I *know* that he's not what he says he is."

"That's my opinion. He looks kinder familiar somehow; but, by the way, Black Boniface's band is on the move again."

"Yas, I know that, too. Ther sogers didn't clean 'em out by a long ways, only discomfitted them for awhile."

"He again becomes the Dread of the Trail, and we'll have to go for the troops again, I suppose."

And thus talking on different matters they soon reached the boy mustanger's cabin, and after stabling their horses in a small covered shed, they entered the house and Kit at once set himself to work to prepare supper.

Which he soon did.

They were devouring the savory food, which had been cooked with no mean hand, and Bill was chatting with his usual good-humor when—

"Hark!" exclaimed Kit.

Two minutes passed.

The next instant rushing footsteps were heard, and a gruff voice said, in a coarse whisper:

"Ready now, boys!"

Bang—ng!

The building shook to its foundation, and the door, with a mighty crash, flew open.

Quick as a flash our friends had a revolver in either hand, for just outside, with their frightful faces spread into a grin of exultation, stood a crowd of painted Apaches.

### CHAPTER III.

#### INACE MURILEZ AND DON CASPER ELONZO.

UPON a branch of the sinuous Rio Pecos, in the midst of a fertile and romantic tract of country, was situated the comfortable and substantial homestead or *hacienda* of Don Canales Murilez.

Don Murilez was a wealthy Spanish ranchero.

His ancestors before him had built the ancient *hacienda*, and herded sheep and cattle upon the luxurious plains about.

The don possessed, with all his other worldly possessions, an exceedingly interesting and devoted family.

Mrs. Murilez, or Donna Murilez, his wife, was a lady of high Spanish birth—of genuine "blue blood." Besides his spouse the don possessed a child—a very beautiful, accomplished and fascinating daughter—Inace.

Inace Murilez was a dark, dashing type of beauty, yet with a natural refinement that betokened a high and cultured mind.

She was much beloved by all who knew her, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, for she was as agreeable and generous as she was beautiful.

Don Murilez was exceedingly rich, and his ranch was an extensive one.

Upon the day on which we open this chapter, Inace, having obtained her father's permission, rode out of the inclosures mounted on her favorite mustang.

"Be careful, Inace, and don't go far," was her father's parting admonition as she started.

"Oh, never fear, father, when I'm on good White Foot," she answered, and rode merrily away.

She had gone a considerable distance, and was passing a little *motte* or grove on the prairie, when upon hearing hoof beats she turned and perceived a horseman approaching.

"Casper Elonzo," she muttered. "I do wish he would keep away from me. He knows I loathe him."

"A pleasant day to you, sweet senorita," said the man, as he approached and touched his hat.

"Good-day, Senor Elonzo," replied the girl, coldly.

The man was evidently a Mexican. His face was dark and sinister; his eyes cunning and snakish. A black mustache graced his upper lip; he was flashily dressed, and a wide-brimmed hat, or *sombrero*, pinned up on one side with a gold star set with diamonds, was set jauntily on a dark mass of coal-black hair.

Riding close up to the girl, he said:

"I want my answer now, Inace. I'm sure you have thought well by this time."

"I *have* thought well, Senor Elonzo," replied the girl, turning upon him. "My answer is as before. I will never marry you as long as God lets me live!"

"Might not the beautiful senorita think a little different?"

"No, sir, I mightn't!" snapped Inace.

"Probably you think more of that dog, Kit Cameron, than of Don Casper Elonzo, the rich ranchero?" said the Mexican, his wrath rising.

"If I do, that's my business, not yours," returned the girl, hotly. "You would not dare to call Kit a dog to his face, Senor Elonzo."

"Is that so? Well, listen, senorita: You'll never belong to another save Casper Elonzo!" He fairly hissed the words in her ear.

"Sir," said Inace, indignantly, "I claim that I have the right to wed whom I choose."

"Well?"

"Senor Elonzo, I would thank you to go your way and I will go mine."

"Would you, though? Suppose I don't choose to, senorita?"

The girl made no reply, nor looked at her disagreeable companion.

"Inace, I have sworn to make you my wife, and I will do it. You had as well say yes."

"I would thank you to never mention that subject in my presence again, sir. I will never marry you of my own accord, and papa has said the same thing. Now, if you are a gentleman, you will molest me no farther, senor."

The ranchero's wooing had taken a decidedly interesting turn in affairs.



"And now," added the girl, wheeling her pony, "I must go home."

"*Caramba!* hold! I want you!" he hissed, and he grasped the bridle-rein of the girl's mustang.

"Don Elonzo, let go that rein!"

"Not much! I want to speak with you."

"Sir, will you allow me to pass?" exclaimed Inace, indignantly, her dark eyes flashing with intense hatred, her graceful figure drawn erect, and facing the object of her wrath unflinchingly.

"When I get ready for you to go I will," replied the Mexican, with a leer.

"When will that be, senor?" asked the girl, calmly.

"In course of time. But why, senorita, will you not become Donna Elonzo?"

For a moment she was so enraged she could not speak; her one desire, just then, was to have her own small der-ringer, which lay in a drawer at home, and had she had it Casper Elonzo would have most certainly left at its muzzle, if that weapon would have had any influence over him, which it undoubtedly would, for it would have been held with a very steady hand, as Inace was not a mere novice with a fire-arm by any means, thanks to her father's teaching.

Her only answer to the don's question was to hit her pony a smarting cut with a raw-hide whip she held in her hand, and it broke from the ranchero's hold and bounded away.

A furious oath burst from the man's lips.

"*Carapo!*" he gritted "you *shall* be mine by fair means or foul!"

Digging the spurs into his horse's side he dashed after and alongside the fleeing girl and—

Received a stinging blow in the face with the raw-hide whip!

And another curse came from his lips.

Leaning far forward, he threw his arm about the girl's waist, and in spite of her desperate resistance, he raised her from her saddle, and lifting her in front of him he turned his horse's head and dashed away in an opposite direction from the Murilez ranch!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TWO PARDS ESCAPE.

FOR a moment intense silence reigned.

It was a wild scene—the two mustangers in the cabin facing the intruders with leveled revolvers, and the Apaches without spellbound at the unexpected reception.

"Jewhitaker slam-ups! Why don't you come on, ye red ha'r-tarers o' perdition?" suggested Tiger Bill, coolly.

The savages were about to do that same with a mad rush, when Kiowa Kit's voice rang out in the one word:

"Hold!"

"Apaches," he then continued, "what means this intrusion?"

One of the braves stepped forward a couple of paces and proceeded to answer:

"White Plume, the great chief of his band, speaks. Let the ears of the pale-faces be open. He has come with many braves for white hunters. They dare not resist."

"Now looker hyar, you greasy red son o' a mangy tick-chawed Kiote, ef yeou come hyar with thet ijee inter yer nozzle, ye're slightly off yer nut. An' besides, ef ye persist in comin' on inter this hyar ranch, why, Jumpin' Jeems o' Jimtown! ye'll git sent higher'n Pikes' Peak in about two flimsy jerks o' a dead lam's tail! Hyar me!" and Tiger Bill finished with a snorting grunt.

"The pale-face's tongue is crooked," replied the chief; "White Plume is followed by many warriors, and they are eager for the scalps of white hunters!"

"That's all right, so far as it goes," returned Kit; "but white hunter's scalps are not ready this evening to take so extended a promenade, so you had better call again at some future time, Mr. White Plume."

The Apache said not another word, but he gave a wild war-whoop instead!

Instantly every savage rushed towards the objects of their vengeance, and then the revolvers of the mustangers began to speak. But they heeded not the shots and pushed madly forward in at the open door of the cabin.

"This way, quick! up to the loft!" exclaimed Kiowa Kit, as he sprang back and up a ladder that led to the loft above.

Bill quickly followed him.

Not a shot had been fired by the Apaches. They seemed to want prisoners, not scalps.

"Up after them!" shouted the excited chief.

"Back! ther first one that touches that ladder gits a bullet in the'r brain!" yelled Tiger Bill from above.

The warriors hesitated.

"Up that ladder, I say! Forward!"

They stood irresolute.

"Better *burn* 'em out, cap" said a gruff voice at the chief's side.

The leader answered him with an oath.

"Up that ladder, cowards!" he yelled, and a volley of oaths burst from his lips.

"Up we'll go then," answered one, and he commenced to ascend.

One, two, three, four rounds up on the ladder, when there was a loud report.

The brave man clasped his hands to his head, staggered, lost his footing, and with a low moan fell to the floor.

"I warned ye fairly," came from the loft, "an' it had to be did. Let all concerned take notice of the neat and stylish manner in which it was did; orders filled at all hours."

The speaker, Bill, spoke in a heartless tone, but the words came not from his heart. As he had said, the work he had just committed had to be done—could not be helped to save his own and Kit's lives. And he knew that such words would help to intimidate those blood-thirsty demons below.

Again the voice of the chief was heard as he heaped maledictions and curses on the two mustangers. Then in a low tone he ordered his followers outside, taking their slain comrade with them; then walking to the rude fire-place, he scattered the burning embers right and left over the floor.

In a moment the cabin ignited and the fiery flames shot toward the ceiling.

Then he, too, stepped from the burning building into the open air.

The other Apaches had already surrounded the cabin.



Ah! would it not now go hard with our friends?

But let us return to them.

"Jewhitaker slam-ups!" Tiger Bill gave vent to his favorite exclamation, as he eyed Kit dubiously. "What's to be did, little un?"

"Follow me; we'll have some fun, pretty soon," that worthy answered, coolly.

He quickly descended the ladder, followed by Bill.

As they reached the floor below they were discovered by the Apaches, and yells of exultation rent the air. The chief saw them, too, and he quietly chuckled to himself at the success of his venture, and ordered a closer approach to the cabin, and to make ready to overpower them as they ran out.

The mustangers had no time to fool away, as the flames were all about them and rapidly spreading. Bill had no idea of what Kit intended to do, but being assured by the latter's confidential manner, he followed unhesitatingly.

He was not kept long in suspense.

Kit stooped down, touched a small slide in the burning floor, and instantly a large black hole was revealed to Bill's startled gaze.

"Down in there, quick!" exclaimed the boy mustanger.

The older man was not loath to obey, as it was getting decidedly hot in that immediate vicinity.

He knew now what their means of escape was to be, and *instantly dropped out of sight into the hole!*

Kiowa Kit immediately followed him, and again touched the little "slide," and the trap door flew back in its place, leaving them in pitchy darkness.

They found themselves in just what it was.

A tunnel, underground, that had been dug half a year before for just such an emergency, and which led outward some eight yards, and finally came up in the little shed-stable, where were now standing the three horses of the mustangers.

Slowly the two groped their way forward, on their hands and knees, till they were right under the corner of the shed.

Here was another trap-door supported by two stout beams, and fastened down with a hook and staple.

Kit quietly unfastened and raised this, and listened.

He could hear the Apaches stirring about outside, and occasionally their voices reached his ears; and one thing, especially, did not escape his notice. Not one of them spoke in the Indian tongue, *but in plain English!*

He did not notify Bill of this observance, but quietly awaited developments.

He had a plan in his mind, which he intended to put into execution for a little "fun" if all worked well.

"Jumpin' Jeems of Jimtown!" muttered Bill; "we'd 'ave been in a purty pickle ef it hadn't been for this hyar thing. How'd yer happen to dig it, enyhow, Kiowa?"

"When I staked a claim here I thought it might go well some time, so I just dug it. Sh!"

Footsteps were heard approaching, and Kit silently lowered the trap; but they soon died away, and once more the door was raised, letting in a flood of light from the burning cabin.

Minutes passed.

Finally Kit thought that it was time to put his plan into

execution, and again he wriggled back under the floor of the house, which had by this time burnt down, as the boards and logs had been as dry as tinder, and the flames had not been long in reducing it to ashes.

The Apaches had been greatly surprised and chagrined when they saw their prey sink out of sight; but they immediately suspicioned that it was but some means of theirs to escape, and commenced to scour the vicinity. But of course they were unsuccessful; they hardly knew either how the mustangers could escape, and thought that maybe after all they had been accidentally killed. We said that they were surprised when the two so mysteriously disappeared; but they were still more so when a stern voice rang out on the night air *from the midst of the flickering remains of the cabin*, and it was at once recognized as the voice of Kit Cameron:

"Black Heart, chief of Apaches!"

The leader started and fixed his gaze on the building.

"Black Heart, chief of Apaches!" again came from the burning mass.

"To whom do you speak?" asked White Plume.

"To you. Black Heart, your cut-throat friends have unconsciously us killed this night, but our spirits will haunt and track you to your death. Beware! Beware!"

Then came a terrible, blood-chilling laugh from the midst of the charred wood and heaps of ashes that made the before so blood-thirsty Apaches quake and shiver to the marrow of their bones. They were spell-bound, they could not move for the moment even to draw a weapon.

Then there was silence as of death.

Suddenly again came that wild, ringing laugh.

The Indians could face death, but this—it was something more than they had bargained for, and with one mad rush they reached their mustangs, and hastily mounting, they dashed away at the top of their horses' speed.

But again, to clap the climax, that blood-curdling laugh echoed and re-echoed through the wood, and after the frightened red-skins, and causing Bill, who had crept to the opening of the shed, to shiver and draw a revolver.

"Slamups!" he muttered, "that's a kinder strange per-ceedin', seems ter me."

For as much as five minutes he stood in the shed listening intently, but no sound reached his ears.

"Wonder whar' Kiowa went so suddint, enyhow. But Jumpin' Jeems! didn't those cusses git when that thing laughed so scary like, though? Strange what it was! Et surely must have been some trick o' someun's to scare those greasy ha'r-t'arers away. But, hyar, Bill, what's ther matter with you? a standin' hyar like an old cow with a rubber tail an' not investin' this mystery at all. Guess I will, though, ef I did fureget it afore."

"Never mind, Bill," answered a voice, and Kiowa Kit stood by his side; "it was me, ole man, and nobody else. Whew! didn't I make those Indians git, now say?"

"Wall, yes, somewhat. Ef we'd a had Luke hyar to throw that ranktankerin' voice o' his'n round in ther air, in ther boots of ther reds, in their hats, and ever' place else, they'd a got skeered some more, I reckon, leetle 'un, eh?"

"Yes, Lasso's a good 'un, sure."

"Wall, Kiowa, s'posin' we vamoose?"

"I'm agreeable."



"Ther 'Paches'll be back hyar a-'hoopin' purty soon, an' we'd better g-i-t—git;" and Bill proceeded to lead forth the white mustang, followed by Dashing Arrow.

"It's a hard go on me to-night," remarked Kit, soberly, as he brought out his horse.

"Yes, I know, leetle 'un, but I've got a shanty, an' don't ye forgit it!"

No further words were said at the time, and, mounting, the two galloped toward Tiger Bill's cabin, which was situated a dozen miles distant.

## CHAPTER V.

### WHITE MAN OR INDIAN?—LASSO LUKE'S WARNING.

THE stream described in the first page of our opening chapter wound its way along in a south-easterly course, in some places over rocks; in others, sand and pebbles, and in one place through a deep and not unnarrow gorge, and then, a little further on, emptied into a branch of the Pecos.

The canyon, or gorge, was about sixty yards long. On one side was a solid wall of rock nearly forty-five feet high, and almost perpendicular; on the other, the side sloped upward, and was composed of sandy, gravelly earth and projecting rocks, while moss, lichens and stunted bushes of various kinds struggled manfully to keep alive and gain a footing in the unrich soil. This side was several yards higher than the opposite one. The bottom was not unlevel, and was covered with small rocks and pebbles. On the side near the perpendicular wall the before-mentioned stream trickled along, and covered nearly two-thirds of the bottom of the gorge.

A party of men on the day in question sat on their horses in the canyon and looked around them with an air of anxious perplexity.

They were headed by a dark-complexioned man, with a pleasant, kindly face, that just now wore a troubled and perplexed look.

In fact, it was Don Canales Murilez and his men in search of his missing daughter, Inace.

For several hours, they had wandered about and, except the pony that had wandered home, had found no trace of the missing girl. The father's anxiety was great, for he loved his daughter dearly.

Now, as they loosened the reins that the beasts might drink of the refreshing water, a small pebble came whirling down the steep and struck the don on the head, causing an involuntary look upward.

There, standing on the shelving rock, stood a strange being that resembled a human, but was more like some wild animal.

Seeing their master's curious gaze, the men, too, looked upward and beheld the strange personage who stood silently contemplating them.

But seeing that he had attracted their attention, the object of their notice began leaping from rock to rock, and from place to place whereon to gain a footing, and came rapidly down the hazardous descent.

The men watched with intense curiosity the wild fellow as he came bounding down the perilous steps.

In a few moments, with a final lunge he landed in front of Don Murilez, and folding his arms over his breast, coolly

surveyed him. It was plainly perceptible that he was an Indian. His form was straight and regular; his eyes dark and piercing; his dress was made up of the skins of many different animals; two eagle-plumes, torn and bent, hung from a band that encircled his head, while moccasins encased his feet; a belt, made of the skin of some animal, was tied around his waist, and contained a revolver and scalping knife.

For a moment he gazed steadfastly at the don, who as equally returned the gaze.

"Who are you?" the latter demanded.

"Who is it that speaks?" the Indian replied, eying him sharply.

"I am Don Canales Murilez."

"And I am Wa-ca-sa."

"Who is Wa-ca-sa?"

Pale-faces call him the Indian trailer."

"And who might you be trailing?"

"Wah! he asks too many questions. 'Tis not his business."

"Where do you live?"

"Ugh! Nowhere, pale-face. The flowers do not bloom nor the birds sing for Wa-ca-sa. All is dark now. His heart wants blood, and then it will be bright, and he will return to his lodge."

"Well, you're a queer creature, I must say!" the don avowed; "are you on the war-path alone?"

"Wa-ca-sa wants no company."

"Well, what on earth are you trailing about, Senor Wa-ca-sa?"

"Wagh! did not the pale-face dog come to the Indian's lodge and rob him of——"

Crack!

The trailer staggered forward, and nearly fell, but recovering himself, he pressed his hand to his head, and, turning, he bounded away down the canyon like a deer, and was soon lost to sight.

The amazed girl hunters for a moment were almost stupefied.

From whence had the shot come?

The don's gaze sought the sloping side of the gorge.

A thin wreath of smoke was curling upward from some bushes, and it told him that from there the shot had come.

The leader knew not what to do. While he hesitated another form arose from behind a clump of bushes; it was about the same place that the Indian had been when discovered.

"Lasso Luke!" involuntarily fell from the don's lips.

"Don Murilez," said the stranger, "ye'd better be a git-tin' out o' hyar, er the 'Paches an' outlaws 'll swollop ye up like a skinned tater! Do ye know who that was ye war talkin' to?"

"He gave his name as Wa-ca-sa, I believe," the don replied. "An' there's where ye're mistaken. That man were Red Roddy, Black Boniface's 'Right Bower!'"

"Heavens! That man Red Roddy?"

"That he is, ez sure ez he's got a bullet hole through his right ear, where I clipped him. He was just keepin' me hyar till his man could get ye cornered in hyar. Even now they're ridin' like fury for t'other end of the canyon. Turn an' fly, ole hoss, or ye're gone suckers."



"Lasso Luke, are you sure that what you say is true?" the leader asked, doubtfully.

"Ez sure ez I know where your daughter ar! Don't ask a question, but git! Your lives depend on it, Mr. Murilez. Yer gal is safe fer the time. Fly."

Much as the don hated it, he could but do what he was told, and speaking to his men, they turned their horses' heads and dashed away through the canyon, while wild yells and pistol-shots in their rear convinced them of the truth of Lasso Luke's warning.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BATTLE OF THE GORGE, AND THE THREE PARDS ON HAND.

LET us glance a little further down to one end of the canyon towards which Wa-ca-sa had run and disappeared, and from which Don Murilez and his men were riding at so furious a rate.

Two men came dashing into the gorge with nearly a score of yelling Apaches at their heels!

At a glance we recognize them as Tiger Bill and his boy pard, Kiowa Kit.

Their horses were fresh, while those of the Apaches were terribly blown.

The red men were over a dozen rods behind the two mustangers, yelling and firing, and urging their horses forward to their utmost.

As the two men rounded a sharp curve in the gorge, and were for the moment out of sight, Tiger Bill hissed:

"Close to the wall, Kiowa, and a sixer in each hand!"

In a moment the two had drawn to a stand-still; they held the reins in their teeth and a cocked "sixer" in either hand.

A moment more and the Apaches appeared, eager to catch a glimpse of their prey, and almost upon the two mustangers.

"Now!" gritted Tiger Bill, and the four weapons simultaneously poured forth their leaden messengers of death among the red-skin foe.

For a moment the Apaches stood their ground, and several fired at the two mustangers; but flesh and blood could not stand that furious rain of lead, and gradually they fell back out of sight.

"Come on," cried Kit, leading the way, "they'll dash on us now in a jiffy."

"Yas, come on," echoed Bill, "only one—two—five ov 'em down! Are ye hurted, boy?"

"Nary scratch, ole man. There they come!"

Sure enough the Apaches were again in hot pursuit, but the mustangers had gained a good deal during the pursuers momentary confusion.

Crack!

A ball grazed the temple of Kiowa Kit, and, for a moment, he reeled in his saddle, but, regaining himself, he thrust a revolver forward and pressed the trigger.

At the crack of the weapon Wa-ca-sa, the Indian trailer, reeled forward and sank to the ground.

At the sight the Indians urged their horses forward with renewed energy.

"Purty good, leetle 'un! Did it scratch you?" asked Bill.

"I'm as good as several dead men yet," replied Kit.

A few moments more and they emerged from the canyon, and a strange sight met their gaze.

A few rods from the end of the gorge were a party of white men, sitting mutely on their horses, and their flashing eyes glancing over the glistening barrels of their leveled rifles; and just to the side, bearing directly down on the waiting whites, were a score of mounted Apaches.

When the two mustangers suddenly came upon this scene they involuntarily drew rein, but the shouts in their rear caused them to again touch the spurs to their horses' sides.

"It is Don Murilez and his men!" exclaimed Kit; "come on, Bill, we've got a finger in this pie!"

"That's what we hev, leetle 'un! By Jumpin' Jeems! there's that cussed White Plumel!"

"Come on! We'll pay back last night's work!"

Away dashed the two pards directly for the don and his men, while just then their pursuers came dashing out of the gorge and, with wild yells of exultation, went thundering after them.

But another actor now came upon the scene, for suddenly the two mustangers heard a peculiar and familiar yell directly behind them, and glancing back, they saw Lasso Luke, swinging his arms and shouting lustily, and holding his own in the wild run.

Don Murilez and his men drew up in line of battle, moved not a muscle, nor took their eyes from the approaching Apaches as they thundered down upon them.

"It is life or death!" shouted the don, his gleaming rifle leveled at one of the foremost red-skins; "waste not a shot and take careful aim. Fire!"

On the instant fifteen rifles belched forth their leaden messengers of death, and a number of the savages rolled to the ground dead or wounded to be trampled under the flying hoofs of their comrades' mustangs.

But the latter did not waver. On they came, and their revolvers cracked with deadly effect.

The white men threw aside their emptied rifles, while pistols and knives took their place; then with wild yells they charged among the red skins, shooting and slashing on the right and left, not a man faltering in his bloody work for they knew that it was life or death, and though outnumbered, they fought with the utmost desperation.

But now the three pards dashed up, and turning as one man, six revolvers leaped from their belts and a rattling fusilade was commenced on their twelve pursuers.

Hardly a shot missed its man. Half their number were down before the Apaches succeeded in firing a shot, and these were wild, and some flew wide of their mark—not one true enough in its aim to touch one of the brave mustangers. Shot after shot leaped from the muzzles of the revolvers of the latter, and in a few moments the remaining four of their pursuers broke and fled with yells of baffled rage. Then a wild shout burst from the three pards' lips, and inserting loaded cartridges into the empty chambers of their pistols, they turned their attention to the foes of Don Murilez's men, and dashing forward they plunged into the thickest of the fight.

The don's men had been slowly giving way, but now at sight of this reinforcement they lunged forward with renewed energy.

White Plume urged his followers forward with oath and



shout, and madly they rushed forward, but the brave whites gave way not a foot, and then in turn they began slowly to retreat.

"Forward, men!" shouted Tiger Bill, digging the spurs into his horse's side.

But as he said the words, the remaining of White Plume's discomfited band of braves turned and dashed away in spite of their leader's cursing commands, and he was forced to follow at a headlong gallop to save his life.

"Let 'em go!" shouted Bill, "we'll not do much good chasin' 'em! Je-whitaker slamups!" Tiger Bill burst into a wild shout of victory, in which he was joined with a good will by the remainder of the victors.

Out of the eighteen of the don's men who went into the fight but eight remained unharmed, who immediately went to work to attend to the suffering of the wounded.

Lasso Luke and Tiger Bill at once dismounted and set about hunting for Kiowa Kit, for they had not seen him for the past ten minutes. In doing so they suddenly came upon the body of Don Murilez lying where he had fallen.

Lasso Luke bent over him for a moment and then said, in answer to Bill's inquiring glance:

"He's all hunk, I'm thinkin'. His beater is still a thumpin', enyhow. Hyar, man"—addressing one of the don's followers—"ye'd better carry yer master down to the crick there, an' wash an' tie up his wound."

Several of the men sprang to obey and the two pards went on.

In a moment more they came upon Kiowa Kit; but just as they reached him they saw him open his eyes, stare around for a moment, and then carefully feel of his forehead.

"Are ye hurted, boy?" inquired Bill.

Kit looked up, and continued to rub his head.

"That's what I was tryin' to find out. I guess I'm not, though. I'll git up and see," and he sprang nimbly to his feet.

"I reckon ye're not gone under yet, pard," said Luke.

"One more score to settle between me an' White Plume. It was him that shot me. I saw him aiming and dodged, but his ball stunned me, I guess, I'm all hunk, though, now."

"Pards, I've a 'spicion that them Injuns are not jist right," said Bill. "Luke, if ye've got that stuff along with ye, jist dob some on it onter that young buck's face and see if it's genuine."

"An' I'd bet my bottom dollar that yer 'spicion is kerect. Yes, I've got that stuff 'long an' we'll try that young feller."

As he spoke, Luke took from his pocket a small bottle containing a liquid substance, and followed by Kit and Bill, he went up to, and bent over a fallen brave, and pouring a little of the bottle's contents in the palm of his hand he rubbed it on the face of the warrior.

Scarcely had he rubbed his hand across his face twice before the paint came off, and it showed that the man *was white!*

## CHAPTER VII.

### WHITE PLUME RETURNS "HOME."

"JEWHTAKER slamups!" cried Bill, "it ar' jest as I expected."

"And he was one of Black Boniface's band, ten to one!" said Kit. "And I'll bet that White Plume is Black Bonny himself!"

"Ye're right, thar', leetle 'un. I expect thet all o' them bucks war' white men. Lasso, try another one ov 'em."

Luke again rubbed some of the liquid on a dead warrior's face, but this one proved genuine.

Then he tried another, and he was white!

"Part Injuns an' part devils," he remarked, straightening up, and replacing the bottle in his pocket.

"How'd ther don and his men happen down hyar, enny how?" inquired Bill.

"He was in search of his darter."

"What is that?" cried Kit.

"Just what I said. His darter has eloped, vamoosed, or suthin' o' the kind, he thinks. But I know whar she ar,' she's in ther home o' White Plume, or Black Boniface, fer they ar' one and the same."

"Are you sure of it?" asked Kit anxiously.

"Wal, I should say so, I seen him take her there with my own eyes, an' they're purty good uns; I couldn' help ther little gal then' er I'd a done it."

"And yer know whar' his home ar' then?" said Bill.

"Yes, I found out, you bet." An' if Kit's gal ain't in there I'm a liar."

"Then she'll be out before to-morrow's sun goes down if I can save her!" cried Kiowa Kit.

"And we's with yer, leetle un," said Bill; "and now let's go down an' see how ther don ar' gettin' along."

The three now rode down to the "creek," where the needs of the wounded were being attended, to render any necessary aid, and Kit anxious to find out the particulars concerning the girl, Inace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two hours after, when the shades of night were falling, a slow procession might have been seen winding its way in a southerly direction, towards the homestead or *hacienda* of Don Murilez, and a glance inside of the covered vehicle—which had been sent for the purpose—accompanying it, would have shown that in it were four wounded men, among them the don himself.

And a little further back on the prairie could be seen four new-made graves, one considerably larger than the other.

And near the creek, their wounds bandaged and the water within reach, and propped up to a sitting position, were three men—two whites and one Indian.

After tending to their wants, and leaving them in possession of their arms, the don's men had abandoned them to their fate.

The "three pards" were nowhere in the vicinity.

\* \* \* \* \*

Loud and deep were the curses that White Plume uttered at his defeat when his warriors stopped a mile distant from the place where the small battle had occurred.

"It war no use, cap'n," said one; "ther boys war drop-pin' on all sides, an' them three white devils, them pards, were jest shootin' 'em down ez fast ez they could pull trigger; it war a little teu unhealthy there fer us."

"Carajo! you were cowards!"



"Maybe we war, cap'n," said the first speaker, "but ez I sed, et war teu hot fer us."

"If we hed dropped them," said White Plume, with a bitter oath, "we could have ridden down to his ranch, and it would have been nothing to fix those herders with cold lead, for the don had most of his men with him. Then see what a prize would have been on hand."

"Yes, I know, cap'n; ef a few more o' ther boys had a been along we could a wiped 'em out. We'd a done it enyhow ef it hadn't been fer them three devils. As it was, it was too much. Ef we'd a got 'em fenced there in ther canyin we'd a had 'em. But they found it out some way an' skipped."

"Red Roddy failed in some way to keep them there; and I shouldn't be surprised to find that he'd gone under, too."

"Now, cap'n, yer needn't rave round any more, fer we done ther best we could. It doesn't look ez if we war cowards—only twelve o' us left. So let's git back home—no good hyar."

"Who's that comin' yonder?" suddenly said one of the men, as they were about to start.

They looked in the direction he pointed and perceived four horsemen approaching. They were coming at a swift gallop, and were soon in hailing distance, and were recognized as part of their own band.

Soon they rode up, and the leader said, bitterly:

"Cap'n, we're what's left of ther seventeen that rode in to ther canyin. Them three devils done it."

A torrent of abuse burst from the "cap'n's" lips.

"Curse them!" he hissed; "they shall pay dearly for this day's work!"

"That they will, cap'n; they fooled us tother night—that is, two on 'em did; but we'll avenge ther stiff pards, we must—we've got to, cap'n!"

"Boys," said White Plume, addressing his followers, "you all know how many of us there was when we started from home, and now see what is left; sixteen tired and defeated men. Who done it?"

"Them three pards, cap'n, war the cause o' it, I reckon."

"Yes, the three pards. See what they have done. Think what a prize we would have had, had it not been for them; think how they shot your fellows down in cold blood, and laughed at their sufferings: now shall our comrades go unavenged, while we stand back, and let them go free to spoil our future plans, and to spy upon us and again bring the soldiers down upon us?"

A rousing cheer rent the air from the men's throats, and one of them said:

"Lead ther way, cap'n, an' we'll avenge our pards—Roddy an' the men. They war true pards, an' we'll not rest till ther 'pards' are wiped out!"

"That's our ticket, cap'n; no torture are bad enough fer them devils."

"Then let us go home and recruit up a little, and then—*Caramba!* we will terribly avenge Red Roddy and our pards!"

He said not another word, but turned his spirited horse, and, followed by the men, galloped away toward the west.

For as much as an hour and a half they rode in this direction over the vast expanse of prairie, which was dotted here and there with small *mottes* or groves of timber, till at last they came to a mountainous tract of country, more or less timbered, with high rocky ledges nearly barren of vegetation, between which were rough, rocky gulches; the sides of some of which were covered with a low, stunted growth of bushes and thickets.

Into one of these the men rode, and following it up for a considerable distance till it narrowed and came nearly together, they dropped back in single file, and pushing on for a short distance, they soon emerged into a small clearing. Through this they rode and into the bushes that bordered its sides, and rounding a sharp extending ledge of rock again came into a clearing, much larger than the first and covered with a growth of soft, green grass, considerably

trampled down, for on one half of it a large number of horses were corraled.

"Halt! Who goes thar?" suddenly smote their ears.

"Captain Boniface and his men!" answered White Plume.

"Back again, cap'n; glad ter see yer. Pass on," said the guard.

They rode forward to the corral, and all dismounting, they removed the bridles and saddles from their horses, and picketed them on the green grass.

Then, walking on a short distance, they dropped on their hands and knees, and in single file crept along a low, narrow pass, which gradually became larger as they advanced, till at last they rose up without difficulty.

They found themselves in a large cavernous room, dimly lighted by a pine-knot stuck in a crevice in the wall.

They were again challenged, and passing on through they came to another smaller room, in which was stored a great number of saddles, bridles, blankets, etc.

This room had several outlets, leading in as many different directions.

Turning to the right, they passed through one of these and a narrow pass, and into another room, in which were nearly a score of men,—a mixture of whites and Indians, though mostly of the former.

Some were laying about, half asleep or drunk, while others were engaged in playing cards and drinking; every one seemed to carry a small arsenal of weapons, and they looked as hard a crowd as could well be found.

Their loud, boisterous laughter and profane talk suddenly ceased at White Plume's entrance, and a wild cheer took their place.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"YOU WILL BE MINE."

"BACK again, cap'n, an' with loads o' stuff, I'll bet."

"Yes, lots of it, curse the luck," growled White Plume.

"What's ther matter, cap'n? Didn't you get anything this trip?"

"Got anything? *Caramba!* yes; pounds of cold lead."

"An' ar' that all, cap'n?"

"That is all, Darnly," replied the lately defeated chief.

"An' where ar' the rest o' the boys?"

"Lying back near the Prairie Pass. Red Roddy and all except we sixteen are gone under."

A furious oath came from Darnly's lips.

"Who done et, cap'n?" he asked.

"The boys will tell you, Darnly. I have some business on hand now. And since Red Roddy has gone under, you are lieutenant. Don't forget it, boys—he is lieutenant."

With this the captain passed out of the room and along a narrow passage for a short distance; then pausing before a stout oaken door, he produced a key from his pocket, and unlocking it, passed into the room, closing the door behind him.

For half an hour all was silent in the room, when again the door opened and a man came forth. It was not an Indian, but a white man.

By the light of several pine knots that lighted the passage it could be seen that it was *Don Caspar Elonzo*.

He passed on a few steps, and pausing, unlocked another door and went into this room.

There, reclining on a costly sofa, her head buried in her hands, and her long, glossy tresses of raven hair falling unconfined down to her shapely waist, was Inace Murilez!

She looked up at the man's entrance, while pearly tears coursed each other down her pale cheeks.

Elonzo glanced around the room before he spoke. It was well, yea, elegantly—furnished. A dark Brussels carpet overspread the rocky floor; the walls were not plastered, for they were composed of a rocky substance that glistened like diamond gems; a costly bureau stood in one corner, on which were several ornaments and toilet articles, a fine Swiss clock, whose hand pointed to the hour of



four, and a medium-sized mirror; a marble-covered stand, on which was a pile of books; chairs, among which was a rocker, a bed, and other things, both ornamental and useful, were in the room, besides the easy sofa on which Inace reclined.

"Good-evening, sweet senorita," said Elonzo, in his flatterer tone; "I am delighted at seeing you look so well; it seems that you grow more beautiful every hour."

Inace was disgusted at this speech, and made no answer.

For a moment he waited for her to speak, and then continued, pleadingly:

"Inace, you know for what I come, and I need not tell you. You know, too, that I love you from the bottom of my heart. Only say that you will be my wife."

"Never!" cried Inace; "did I know that my life depended on it, I would not marry you!"

"And why? I am rich, and am not bad-looking. Become my wife, and we will go East and live in elegance. Your every wish will be fulfilled; money will be at your hand's bidding; not a care will be on your mind."

The girl had arisen to her feet.

"Senor Elonzo, did I marry you it would not be for your money. You brought me here and said that I *must* be your wife. Is that the way for a gentleman to act? You came to my father's ranche and asked me the same question that you have asked to-day. You was kindly but firmly rejected, and instead of going away like a gentleman, you brought me here against my will. I would sooner die than become your wife."

Elonzo forced back a curse.

"And why will you not marry me?" he asked.

"I do not love you," the girl replied. "Besides I am pledged to another, and I would sooner die than break that pledge."

"Yes," cried Elonzo, with a horrible oath, "I know who the dog is——"

"Stop!" commanded the girl, in a firm voice, her black eyes flashing; "do not say a harsh word against him in my presence. You know not what I might do."

"Enough of this nonsense," said Casper Elonzo, suddenly calming down; "you will be my wife before to-morrow's sun goes down. So you may prepare."

"I will kill myself before I will marry you, dog of a Mexican!"

"You would not dare!"

"Dare? I would dare to do anything!"

"Why, I believe the little tigress is really mad. When you are my wife I will tame you a little."

"Wife! You will have a corpse for a wife, then!"

"Oh, I think not, sweet senorita. You would not really break my poor, humble heart by killing yourself."

"Leave my presence, dog! You are not fit to live! Leave me, I say, before I tear the eyes out of your head!"

The man was about to reply, but thinking better of it, he turned with a half amused, half threatening smile playing on his features, and passing out of the door, locked it after him.

As his footsteps died away in the pass Inace threw herself forward on the sofa and sobbed as if her young heart would break.

Great Heavens! To be the wife of that man whom she loathed from the bottom of her heart!

He had sworn it, and she was powerless to prevent it.

Would she?

Time would show.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FATE OF FOUR.

#### NIGHT.

The moon, the goddess of night, threw her silvery rays far and wide over the grand extent of prairie and into the gloom of the Prairie Pass; causing the bushes and lichens that grew on its side, now quivering and waving in the

slight breeze, to cast ghostly shadows on the rippling water and rocky trail beneath.

And just beyond, a few rods from the western end of the pass or gorge, sat the three men whom Don Murilez's men had left to their fate; and a terrible fate it seemed about to be, for they were completely surrounded, except on the side of the creek, by a circle of snarling, snapping and ravenous wolves!

They had no means to build a fire with which to keep away the hungry pack, even if they had had the strength to gather fuel.

Their faces were bleached to the hue of death, but their teeth were clenched with the determination to fight to the last breath, for their cocked revolvers were in their hands; and though they had but a few rounds of ammunition, they meant to use it to the best possible advantage, for, though outlaws, they were brave men.

Closer and closer drew the nearly complete circle of blood-thirsty beasts.

Then the wounded three raised their revolvers and blazed away into the howling, struggling mass of flesh. Down went three of the beasts to be torn to fragments by their ravenous companions.

Again and again they fired, until, as the last shot died away, the wolves had withdrawn to a more respectful distance.

A number of them lay either dead or wounded about them, though a good many had been devoured by their ferocious comrades, that stood off and were making the night hideous by their long-drawn howls.

The men said not a word, but quietly awaited the oncoming of the animals. They were too badly wounded to arise, or to attempt to escape. They had but ten shots left, but their knives were in their belts, and ready for use at close quarters.

On came the fierce creatures, their blazing orbs glistening in the moonlight, their lolling tongues hanging from their mouths. Closer and closer they gathered around the doomed men.

Then again the revolvers cracked with deadly effect. As fast as the beasts fell they were savagely devoured by their ravenous companions.

But the firing soon ceased, for their ammunition was exhausted.

Then on rushed the wolves, until they were within a few feet of the desperate men, in whose hands gleamed three long bowies. Narrower and narrower becomes the ring.

The men's backs are to the stream, and wounded as they are, their resistance henceforth will be small.

Now the foremost of the blood-thirsty pack rush forward, only to meet their death by the glistening knives. But the others crowd forward, and in spite of their terrible resistance, the men are over-powered and——

At that instant a half-dozen mounted men thundered down into the midst of the pack, shooting right and left, and in an instant the wolves scattered and scampered away.

Quickly the men dismounted and bent over the fallen three.

"Too late!" broke from the foremost's lips.

It was even so. They found nothing but some half-picked bones, the remains of the three who had but a moment before been fighting for their lives and lost. They turned away and looked around.

"Ther don's men hez tended to 'em," said one, "an' we've only got ter dig for these three. Let's get at it an' skip."

He went to the horses and unstrapped a couple of spades from the back of the saddles of two, and returning, handed one of them to a companion, and they proceeded to dig a grave wherein to inter the bones of the three men.

A half-hour later they were riding through the gorge.

They were part of White Plume's band who had been sent to the battle-ground to bury the dead and take home the wounded.



They had arrived just in time to be in at the death of the latter, and of the dead they found none except the three.

They were about half way through the gorge, when suddenly they were addressed by a voice that seemed to come from directly over their heads, causing them to instantly draw a halt.

"I am Monowaukah, the spirit of the air," was heard, "and I come to warn you. You are outlaws and Apaches, and your leader is Black Boniface. You are in deadly peril, and I would warn you that you may escape. Your retreat has been discovered, and you will be kilt if you don't fly, fer the soldiers are coming."

All this seemed to come from right over their heads, and to say that they were astonished would be expressing it lightly.

They did not see the head and shoulders of a man that was stretched at full length on top of the perpendicular side of the gorge gazing at them, a quiet smile playing on his lips.

"Now, then," the voice continued, "as I have done you a favor, do me one. Tell me what your leader has done with Inace Murilez. Speak, and tell me, or you may drop dead at the wave of my hand——"

The voice stopped suddenly, and a shuffling sound far up nearly over their heads caused them to shift their gaze in that direction, and a blood-curdling sight met their gaze.

On the very verge of the precipice, brought out in plain relief against the moonlit sky, were two men, clenched in a death struggle, the right hand of each grasping a gleaming knife.

The right hand of each, which held the knife, was firmly gripped by the other's left, thus preventing them using the weapons.

To and fro they swayed, each trying to gain the advantage.

The moon, just above them, brought them out in bold relief, causing them to look like small giants.

Eagerly, fearfully, the men below gazed on the startling scene.

Backward and forward they pressed, each straining every muscle to dash the other over the fearful precipice; and a terrible fate it would be, as they knew, should they go.

Their hot breath fanned each other's flushed cheeks, their blazing orbs seemed to emit sparks of fire.

Suddenly the one brought his glittering blade strongly across the back of his adversary's hand, causing it to fall nerveless at his side.

Then, with a subdued yell of victory quivering on his lips, the combatant raised his knife high in the air, and the next instant the glittering steel was buried to the hilt in the other's bosom; in doing so, to his cost, he let loose the knife hand of the latter, who in turn raised his knife to strike.

At this instant the other perceived his danger, and quick as thought he grasped the descending arm, and gathering all his strength, he hurled his antagonist backwards over the dizzy precipice!

A shout of triumph burst from his lips that was echoed by a quivering wail of despair.

As the horrible missile came whirling through the air, the men in the canyon dug spurs into their horses' sides and dashed away with exclamations of terror, while the body struck the waters with a dull splash, and sank beneath the rippling waves.

"Great snakes!" muttered the victor, as he retreated from the spot. "That was the closest call ever I had. Ef he hadn't cracked that stick when he slipped up on me I'd 'a' been in *his* place 'fore now. I war jist practicin' my ventrilokism on 'em a mite, when he came an' spoiled et all, but I'm thankful as it is. Guess I'll vamoose."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE THREE PARDS.

THE sun was just peeping above the eastern horizon.

Two men were seated before a small log-cabin, surrounded by great towering trees around which wild creeping vines clambered and clustered, and more or less undergrowth that flourished by its having taken root in the rich grassy sod.

Near them a bright, cheery fire was burning, over which, suspended by a horizontal pole supported at its ends by two forked sticks driven in the ground, hung a fat, neatly-dressed wild turkey, already becoming brown in the glowing blaze.

A short distance from the cabin was a corral in which was a number of horses. Most of them had lately been running wild on the prairie, but had been caught and tamed by the three mustangers, for this was Tiger Bill's ranche, and the two men in front of the cabin were none other than Tiger Bill and Kiowa Kit.

Among the horses could be recognized Darting Arrow and White Comet, the late wild leader, besides Kiowa Kit's horse, Black Samson.

But the two pards were not alone, for Lasso Luke was sitting within the cabin, engaged in cleaning his revolvers.

Kiowa Kit was superintending the cooking of the breakfast of wild turkey, that sent forth a savory smell that helped to sharpen the appetites of the three.

Bill was seated on the soft green grass, watching Kit and talking in his good-humored way.

"Boye," he said, "we've got to do something to-day. Lasso says he knows whar Black Bonny's home-base ar, an' thet yer sweetheart is in thar. Now ther fust thing ye know he'll take ther gal an' skin out to ther mountains with her, an' that'll be ther last ye'll see o' her. Yer want ter git her out o' thet, I know. How're ye goin' ter do it?"

"I don't know yet, Bill," replied Kit. "But she'll get out, mind that."

"Now, I think we'd best do what we did afore. Let Luke—ez he knows all about et—go to the fort an' bring ther sojers. They kin git hyar by evenin', and then kin chase Bonny out, ef he ain't too sharp fer 'em like he was afore. Then ye kin git yer gal, we'll annihilate ther 'Trail Devils,' git ther truck an' have some fun."

"That's it!" cried Kit. "The very thing! Won't I be on hand, though? Won't I pay off old scores? Well, you just bet I will, Bill Groscon."

"I know ye will, Kiowa. An' then when ther sojers go back, we'll take them mustangs along, an' sell 'em to ther fort. Lasso?"

"Well, ole man?" Luke answered, coming out of the cabin.

Then Bill told him his plan.

"Thet's just what I war goin' to do, anyway. The comandant knows me well enough to know thet I wouldn't load his troops inter a trap. Ef I don't have the sojers hyar by evening then I'm a liar."

"Where is Black Boniface's home-base, anyhow, Luke?" asked Kit.

"It's nearly north o' hyar. Where he captured thet wagon train once, you know?"

"There? That's just the place for him. He couldn't have got a better one."

"Ther entrance is ther gulch thet has ther forked peak to ther side. Hurry up thet chick, Kit. I'm getting ravenous."

"Boys, I hed a close call las' night, ther closest I ever had."

"How was thet, Lasso?" asked Bill, drawing his revolver from his belt and examining the load.

"Et war at ther Prairie Pass. You know there was three of them devils left there—the wounded ones? Well, I war comin' long near there las' night when I heard some firing and wolf howls, an' I went over there. Some o' ther



Injun's men had come over to care fer their pards, an' just got there in time to see 'em give up ther ghost. Well, they took an' buried 'em, an' war ridin' back through ther pass, an' I thought I'd have some fun. I was up on ther straight side, so I leaned over and hollered at 'em makin' 'em b'lieve I war a spirit—jist practicin' a little ventriloquism, you know. Well, I hadn't gone more'n to about a half a dozen words when I heard a stick crack behind me, an' I knew what war up right off. So I leaped up an' drewed my bowie, an' lunged inter one o' ther scouts who'd been hangin' round. An' then we had et! We war right on ther edge, an' I tell yer, et war ticklish bizness. But I gave him his sockdologer an' shoved him over; ther men an' me skinned out. I'm getting ravenous; 'bout ready, Kiowa?"

"In a minute—what's up, Bill?"

Tiger Bill had jumped to his feet, his revolver still in his hand. He raised the latter and motioned silence. Then he walked unconcernedly around to the other side of the cabin, and then glided away through the bushes, looked meaningly at Kit—who nodded—and proceeded to replenish the fire.

Fifteen minutes after a peculiar whistle, thrice repeated, reverberated through the wood, causing Lasso Luke to start in the direction from which it came.

A moment or two more he stood beside Tiger Bill, who was bending over an Indian brave, with his knee firmly planted on his chest, his fingers clasping his throat.

"He war spyin' 'round hyar, an' I thought I'd tie him up," explained Bill. "I war watchin' 'im all ther time. Lie still, ye young devil, er I'll shet off yer wind! Bring me a lasso, Luke."

Luke hastened to obey, and soon the young buck was bound firmly and carried into the cabin.

"Now lay there," said Bill, "till I get ready fer ye to go, if I ever do. When ye come flittin' round this ranch ye've got to keep yer eyes open. Ye wasn't watching fer me to hop onter ye, was ye? Well, ye've got to mind out when you're round *hyar*! Got that chick done, Kiowa?"

"Yes; come on and pitch in. But wait! who's that yonder?"

They looked in the direction he pointed, and perceived a horseman coming through the timber.

"Jewhitaker slamups!" cried Bill, "ef it ain't—what ar' his name, Kiowa?"

"Casper Elonzo——"

"Thet's it! Don't let on, boyees, but keep yer eyes peeled. There's mischief afoot, by Jumpin' Jeems!"

The man was coming toward them at a gallop, but his horse's hoofs made hardly a sound, on account of the soft, grassy turf, thus preventing them from discovering his approach sooner.

"Good-morning, senors," said he, as he rode up.

"I reckon as how we're about to partake o' some grub," said Bill; "and, Mister 'Lonzo, ef ye haven't had yer share this mornin', jest clamber down an' dive in."

This was Bill's kind of an invitation of hospitality.

All three seated themselves around the roast turkey that Kit had prepared, leaving a place for a fourth.

Don Elonzo was not slow to accept the invitation. He dismounted, tied his horse to an adjacent tree, and seated himself by the side of Luke.

The meal was soon over, and all rose up, apparently the best of friends.

"Better carry that young buck some grub," said Bill.

"Who?" asked Elonzo.

"Oh, a young red devil thet we took in awhile ago. He was spyin' around, and we fetched him in."

Luke took some of the remains of the turkey and went into the cabin. He unloosed the captave's hand and gave him his breakfast; he ate in silence, and when through, he put his hands back to again be tied, which Luke soon did and left him to his meditations.

Speaking a word aside to Bill, Luke secured his horse from the corral, and rapidly saddling and bridling him, he mounted and galloped away toward the east.

"Where is he going, senor?" asked Elonzo, suspiciously.

"He's goin' out on the prairie to see if there's any mustangs 'round. We thought perhaps there might be a herd down to the crick this mornin'."

"Well, good-day, senors," said Elonzo, mounting his horse.

"Where might ye be goin'?" asked Bill.

"To Don Murilez's ranch."

"Perhaps ye haven't heard thet Inace hez been carried off?"

Elonzo's face paled a little but he replied, assuming a very much concerned air:

"You don't mean to say she has been abducted, senor?"

"I reckon that's about ther size o' it. Ther don got wounded in a fight with some Injuns, an' I guess he's purty low about now."

"*Caramba!* that is bad. I will see him directly. Good-day, senors," and he galloped off through the wood.

"He's ther man," cried Tiger Bill; "yes, sir, he is, by Jewhitaker slamups!"

"Who?" asked Kit.

"Black Boniface!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### REVELATIONS.

"HALT! Paws up! er I'll plug yer nozzle with cold lead!"

Casper Elonzo could do nothing but what he was bid, in the face of the deadly revolver that covered his heart.

The sun had approached the meridian, and Elonzo was just entering the pass that led to the domains of White Plume when a man stepped forth from the shelter of a huge boulder, and presented a cocked revolver with the above command, which he was not slow to obey, for he knew that Tiger Bill was a man of his word.

"Well, my fine chick, what yer doin' up hyar? Is this the way ter that fine ranch o' your'n?"

Elonzo bit his lip to restrain a curse.

"Tis none of your business. Haven't I a right to ride where I choose?"

"Dunno 'bout that; but ye'll find it ar' some o' my business fore ye're through with it. I mean what I said. What yer doin' up hyar?"

"And again I say, 'tis none of your business."

"All right, blast yel let it go. Been over ter Don Murilez's playin' hypercrite, have ye?"

"What do you mean, senor?"

"Oh, yer awful innercent now, aint ye?" said Bill, with a grin. "Perhaps ye can fool the don but ye can't fool me. Where's this pass lead to?"

"I don't know."

"Yer a liar! Tell me where this hyar trail leads to er I'll let daylight through yer ugly carcass in double quick time!"

Casper hesitated. He knew the man he had to deal with well enough to know that he meant strictly what he said. To tell now would expose all, so he determined to again answer as before, and take the chances.

"I tell you I don't know, senor. I became hot and thirsty while riding and sought this place to rest and procre water."

"Once more I ask yer, where does this trail lead to?"

Elonzo saw the finger press on the trigger, saw that for his own well fare it was better to answer honestly.

"To the home of White Plume."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Bill, "I thought I'd fetch you to time. I want ye to tell me who you are; an' no lyin', er I'll make ye repent it, you bet. Who are ye?"

"Why, senor," said Casper, with a blank smile, "I'm Casper Elonzo, the Ranchero."

"Hol yer don't say? It seems to me that ye're a lyin', ain't ye?"

"No, sir; I'm not."

Bill gave a peculiar whistle, and out of the bushes stepped two men—Kiowa Kit and the Indian captive.

But the latter was no longer bound, and was in possession of his weapons.



"Do you know that young buck?" the Tiger asked.

"I never saw him before," responded Elonzo.

"The White Chief lies!" suddenly broke in the Indian.

"The big braves will give me liberty when I tell them that you are White Plume, and I will go back to my people and live in peace."

Casper Elonzo turned deadly pale.

"Who is that man?" Kit asked, smiling.

"When he dresses up like Indian, he be called *White Plume*! When not, his many braves call him *Black Boniface*!"

A fierce oath broke from the man's lips.

"*Carajo!* he lies——"

"Han's up, Bonny—none o' that. That shooter's all right where it is. Kit, 'spect it'd be ther healthiest to hook onter those irons. Git down, ye dog o' a cayote!"

With a smothered curse Elonzo obeyed, and Kit possessed himself of his weapons.

"Git a rope, Kit."

"Here's one. Plug him, Bill, if he kicks."

"That's what I will, little 'un."

In a twinkling Kiowa Kit had the hands of the outlaw and renegade bound firmly to his back.

"There you are! Bring the horses, Panther. Now, Black Boniface, what have you got to say for yourself?" asked Kit, with a grim smile.

"Curse you! you shall die for this!"

"Maybe not. Your men will be in the same fix by tomorrow noon, for the soldiers are coming for them again, and *perhaps* I'll get the girl——"

"Curse the girl! I wish that I'd killed her!"

"No doubt of it."

"Creeping Panther will work for white Indian no longer," said the red man. "He will soon go back to his people, where he will live in peace, and will not war on the white braves, for they are his friends."

"Yes, Creepin' Panther, we're yer frien's ez long ez ye're on ther right side. Now, then, let's go back to ther ranch an' take this kiote fer ter give to ther soldiers at ther fort. Mount!"

Elonzo mounted his horse, and Bill and Kit bound him to the saddle. The Indian had led forth the horse from the side of the trail, and the three mounted, Bill holding the rein of Elonzo's house.

They had just started forward, when the clatter of hoofs came to their ears, and Bill exclaimed:

"Back inter ther bushes an' lay low!"

They drew quickly back into the shadow of the bushes, out of sight, and a moment more a horseman galloped into the pass.

"Who is it, Panther?" whispered Kit.

The Indian bent far forward and gazed steadily at the man, but he shook his head doubtingly and answered:

"The Creeping Panther does not know; he never saw him before."

"Let him go, boyees," said Bill.

A moment more and the horseman had galloped past, and the sound of the horse's hoofs rapidly died away.

They again rode out into the trail and galloped away in a southerly direction, nor did they see the sharp, glittering pair of eyes that peered at them through the bushes, taking in their every movement.

An hour later they entered the timber in which was Tiger Bill's cabin.

As they advanced, a sharp command suddenly caused them to draw rein.

"Halt! or ye're dead men!"

The two pards involuntarily drew their revolvers, but the next instant six men stepped into view, their rifles leveled at the three men.

"Surrender, or ye'll get filled with cold lead."

"Ye've got the drop," said Bill, coolly holding up his hands.

"Get down!"

The three reluctantly obeyed.

"Bind them," commanded Elonzo, "and kill that traitor."

The Indian started. He knew it would be certain death to surrender, and determined that he would sooner die fighting for his life than to be shot in cold blood, when bound. Quick as a flash he jerked the tomahawk from his belt, and raising it in the air he slung it forward with all his strength. With a dull, sickening thud it crashed into the skull of one of the outlaw, and without a groan he sank to the ground. A second more and the five rifles were leveled at him, but before the triggers could be pressed a couple of revolvers cracked and two of the men sank forward, never to rise again.

The two pards were ever ready.

Again the revolvers cracked before the disconcerted rascals could hardly think, and then there was but one.

Like the panther after which he was named, the Indian sprang forward, knife in hand.

But the other was game to the last.

He drew his knife, and bending forward, awaited the onset upon him.

The two came together, clinched, tussled, and fell heavily to the ground, which they had hardly touched before they commenced rolling over and over with great rapidity.

Bill and Kit sprang forward, intending to help the Panther, but so quick was their revolutions that they had no chance.

But the wrestling suddenly ceased.

Bill ran forward.

They were still clasped in each other's arms, but each had a knife buried in his breast!

Thus they lay, even now the look of death was on their faces; their eyes were becoming stony.

Creeping Panther would never go back to his people.

The outlaw would never again serve under the fiend, Black Boniface.

But where was the latter?

He had made good his escape.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AT LAST.

CRACK!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack—ack!

A tremendous volley of shots rang through the outlaws' cavern, and the soldiers rushed forward to be met by the full force of Black Boniface's band.

I will not attempt to describe that struggle; fierce and long it was, and men fell like grass before the scythe under the unerring aim of those practiced marksmen.

Lasso Luke had succeeded, after several trying adventures with Black Boniface's men, which I have here not time or space to relate, in procuring the aid of the soldiers.

He had guided them to the vicinity of the three pards' cabin, where they had arrived just as the sun was sinking behind the far-off western horizon.

After refreshment and rest, just as the goddess of night was ascending the heavens, they set out for the outlaws' cavern, accompanied by the three pards.

Successively capturing the sentinels, they had gained entrance into the cave without the knowledge of those within, and, suddenly falling upon them, fearful indeed was the havoc they committed. But let us not dwell on that scene.

Suffice it to say, that, after thirty minutes from the time that they entered, not an outlaw or Indian was to be seen anywhere in the cave.

"Jewhitaker slamups!" shouted Tiger Bill; "cleaned again, by Jumpin' Jeems!"



Then followed wild shouts from the soldiers in the exuberance of their joy, for Black Bonny had for a long time been the Dread of the Prairie Trail, and he now lay before them breathing his last.

Kiowa Kit bent over him.

"Where is the girl?" he asked. "Tell me before you die."

The wounded man gasped.

"Feel in my pocket for a bunch of keys. Second door to the left, straight down the pass—I am dying—God forgive me!"

With a convulsive gasp he fell back—dead!

Kit quickly produced the keys, and ran down the corridor, and a moment more he stood before his love, Inace Murilez.

Among the dead Bill recognized the horseman that had passed them that day in the gulch leading to the cave.

But no one knew who he was. In fact, he was a former minister of the gospel, but his dissipated habits had caused him to be turned from the church; Elonzo, or Black Boniface, had sent for him to perform the ceremony that would bind Inace Murilez to him for life.

That night the soldiers encamped on the greensward in front of the entrance.

The next morning they returned to the fort, heavily laden with spoils, and accompanied by Tiger Bill and Lasso Luke, with their own mustangs. They drove before them the herd of outlaws' horses, and altogether they looked like a good-sized army.

Inace Murilez had already been escorted home, and great was the joy there; it almost cured the don to get another

look at his daughter, who, in spite of a multitude of questions, related her adventures into sympathizing ears.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CONCLUSION.

A YEAR has passed since the incidents I have here attempted to relate.

The soldiers' work was complete.

Never after that did the name "Black Boniface" strike terror to fearful hearts, but it still lives in their memories.

Why the white outlaws of the band had assumed Indian disguises I cannot positively state.

Their cave had been found stored with the richest of ill-gotten spoils, and when it had been divided among the troops each had a good share for recompense.

Don Murilez rapidly recovered his usual health and strength, and he determined to sell his extensive property and move East, which he done.

Inace had not spoken falsely when she said she was pledged to another, for Kit Cameron had long been her lover, and they now live as man and wife on a grand farm in Central Missouri, caring for their loving father and mother in their old age.

Tiger Bill and Lasso Luke still roam the prairies in search of new and exciting adventures, where we may hear of them at some future time.

And once a year they invariably tramp East to see their old-time pard in his happiness, who always welcomes them gladly to his elegant home.

And now my story is told; kind reader mine.

[THE END.]

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